



Uttarakhand builds 'India's first' grass conservatory

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DEHRADUN: A grass conservatory spread across 2 acres and having 90 species of grass, which the Uttarakhand forest department claims to be the first of its kind in the country, was opened in Ranikhet on Sunday for the public.

The germplasm conservation centre – built by the research wing of the forest department over three years using compensatory afforestation (CAMPAs) funds - displays scientific, ecological, medicinal and cultural information related to all 90 grass species.

Officials involved said some of the grass species housed at the centre, which is divided into seven segments, play a key role in controlling forest fires while others are good at averting human-wildlife incidents through their pungent grass-blade smell.

The conservatory, which has segmented grass species into aromatic, medicinal, fodder, ornamental, religiously- important, agricultural and miscellaneous, aims to recognize the role of various types of grasslands in the ecosystem and promote threatened species. Authorities said carbon sequestration, the process of vegetation capturing and storing atmospheric carbon, has gone down due to urbanization, deforestation and intensive mining.

Chief conservator of forests (research wing) Sanjiv Chaturvedi, whose idea it was to build the conservatory, told TOI, "Grasslands hold more than a third of the world's land-based carbon. Most of that carbon is not touched by wildfires, which typically just burn through above-ground vegetation. In fact, fires can even promote the growth of grasslands and even help them store carbon more efficiently. In forests, severe wildfires release large quantities of carbon into the air and it can take trees decades to recover from that. Certain species of grass stop wildfires." The conservatory houses the fire-resistant "Thysanolaena maxima" species, also known as tiger grass or broom grass. "Found along steep hills, ravines and sandy river banks up to an altitude of 2,000 metres in Uttarakhand, its dry flowering stocks are used as brooms by locals and the green portion, which grows round the year, as fodder. The perennial species also prevents erosion on steep slopes and is planted to revive barren lands. This grass is widely being planted across Nepal for slope stabilization and soil moisture retention," Chaturvedi added.

The scientist in-charge of the Doon office of the Botanical Survey of India, SK Singh, lauded the initiative. "Some species of grass, which serve as fodder for livestock, as well as some bamboo species that have multifarious utility, do require germplasm conservation," he told TOI. Notably, the fragmentation of grasslands in states like Gujarat and Maharashtra has affected the population of the Great Indian Bustard.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/uttarakhand-develops-indias-1st-grass-conservatory-at-ranikhet-with-90-species/articleshow/87704347.cms>